

MYSTIC MUSEUM OF ART

FEBRUARY 27 COMMERCE COMMITTEE PUBLIC HEARING in **opposition** to HB 6659

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Mystic Museum of Art (MMoA)

Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to HB 6659.

MMoA is a case study of the efficacy of state funding. An artist's membership organization for more than 100 years, MMoA achieved its transformation into a fully programmed Museum in 2022, thanks to funding from CT Humanities and the Office of the Arts.

Returning to 2019 funding levels would undermine the gains that this organization was able to accomplish last year, and return CT to second class status in the world of arts and culture that attract such high levels of tourism and population growth to New York and Massachusetts.

Here are just a few of the economic, cultural, and community gains that we were able in one short year, due to the assurance of state funding.

- MMoA welcomed more visitors than ever before, more than 5,500 over the summer, alone.
- By September, daily visitation had tripled over pre-pandemic levels.
- Visitors came from 1,626 unique zip codes.
- 44% came from out of state.
- State funding enabled us to leverage an additional \$108,000 in local business and individual sponsorships.
- MMoA applied its first ever admission fee of \$10 over the summer, with a goal of \$25,000. We reached \$41,380 and membership income rose \$5,000.
- The new Museum Store, featuring local artists, drew more than \$9,000 in sales.

At the same time, we expanded access.

- Thanks to CT Humanities *Summer at the Museum* funding, CT families of children 18 and under with an adult visited for free, as did veterans, active military and their families
- Summer school programs and retirement homes enjoyed free tours and talks.

- Overall, a full 20% of our visitors visited for free.

Media coverage reached farther and lasted longer than ever before.

- Articles and reviews appeared in national publications such as *Broadway World* and *The Saturday Evening Post* as well as regional papers.

It wasn't just the quantity of visitors; it was the quality of their engagement—with the exhibitions and with each other—that proved so successful.

- More than 1,000 visitors created self-portraits in the “Visiting Artists” gallery.
- MMoA offered public programs every Tuesday night all summer.
- Events ended by 6:30 PM to encourage patronage of local restaurants for dinner.

In the end, we know that funding for these exhibitions was successful because our visitors told us so.

Here are some quotes:

- *Drove all the way from NYC just to appreciate this amazing exhibit.*
- *Beautifully exhibited – love the humor and presentation is very special. Thank you...*
- *A beautiful exhibition that offers an insight about modern US history. Thank you!*
- *Lots of good artwork... I love this museum! Very informative and so much fun to look at memorable times in America.*

We saw the visitors in our galleries, talking, looking, thinking, asking questions. We saw them return with family members, visitors, and social groups. We responded to their questions about what was coming next.

A welcoming, safe, curated, social space where residents and visitors alike find enrichment, quickly becomes a community hub. At a relatively modest level of investment compared to peer states in New England, Connecticut can ensure this kind of access. How? By matching the investment of mission-driven and community minded individuals, such as my staff, and by giving them the economic security to do what they do best: forging magnificent opportunities for the public to experience inspiration, scholarship, care, and devotion. I know of no other sector where so many accomplish so much for so little.

MMoA thanks the committee for recognizing the importance of arts, culture, and tourism to CT's economy by maintaining or boosting current funding levels.